New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

Volume XII, Number 20 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 15, 1951

1951 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

1950 Vol.

Stage Play	Page
*Affairs of State	267
Arms and the Man	235
Bell, Book and Candle	206
Black Chiffon	261
Bless You All	170
*Call Me Madam	243
Captain Brassbound's Conversion	157
Cocktail Party (The)	376
Country Girl (The)	210
Enemy of the People (An)	154
*Guys and Dolls	185
Happy Time (The)	370
King Lear	160
Lady's Not for Burning (The)	213
Member of the Wedding (The)	397
Out of This World	166
Pardon Our French	254
Peep Show	285
Peter Pan	306
Ring Round the Moon	189
Season in the Sun	258
Twentieth Century	163

•

1949 Vol.

*Diamond Lil	369
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes	198
*South Pacific	312

•

1948 Vol.

Kiss Me, Kate	91
Mister Roberts	338
Where's Charley?	197

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 15, 1951*

1951 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1951
Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	Page	Stage Play	Page
Angel in the Pawnshop	380	Make a Wish	294
Angels Kiss Me	297	Mary Rose	328
Autumn Garden (The)	325	Mikado (The)	370
*Bagels and Yox	238	*Moon Is Blue (The)	322
Billy Budd	353	*Music in the Air	215
*Borscht Capades	235	Night Music	300
Courtin' Time	254	Not for Children	348
Cox and Box	341	Oklahoma!	257
Darkness at Noon	388	Out West of Eighth	232
Dream Girl	271	Peer Gynt	373
L'Ecole des Femmes	307	Pirates of Penzance (The)	341
Flahooley	264	Razzle Dazzle	339
Four Twelves Are 48	384	*Remains To Be Seen	223
Getting Married	268	Romeo and Juliet	318
*Glad Tidings	212	*Rose Tattoo (The)	363
Gondoliers (The)	351	Royal Family (The)	392
Gramercy Ghost	281	*Saint Joan	220
Green Bay Tree (The)	368	School for Wives (The)	307
Green Pastures (The)	312	Second Threshold	398
H.M.S. Pinafore	361	*Seventeen	250
High Ground (The)	336	Small Hours (The)	344
House of Bernarda Alba (The)	395	Springtime Folly	331
Idiot's Delight	260	Springtime for Henry	315
Iolanthe	347	*Stalag 17	274
*King and I (The)	304	Taming of the Shrew (The)	284
King of Friday's Men (The)	334	Ti-Coq	358
King Richard II	376	*Tree Grows in Brooklyn (A)	291
*Lace on Her Petticoat	242	Trial by Jury	361
Little Blue Light (The)	278	Twilight Walk	228
Long Days (The)	288	*Two on the Aisle	246

CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD 302

Theatre Openings
"Glad Tidings"
"Music in the Air"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 15, 1951*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK MIRROR

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Glad Tidings"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

October 12, 1951

By Bert McCord

Not So Glad

Morality is probably the last grounds on which a play should be criticized, so let it be said that "Glad Tidings" was derailed in the second act Thursday night when it reached the fork between good comedy and bad taste and the author failed to throw the right switch. Capriciously designated as a romantic comedy, the Edward Mabley play is basically concerned with a young boy and girl and their attempts to find a father, almost any father, but preferably the man that their actress-mother was going with at the time.

Comedy knows no bounds and certainly the subjects of doubtful paternity and even legitimacy have both done noble service in the matter of evoking belly-laughs. But when Mr. Mabley permitted his boy and girl to grow into wonderful, warm, lovable kids, his comedy turned suddenly rancid. At one point in the second act, a lusty strip-tease or a good, down-to-earth instance of incest would have done much to clear the air. There was nowhere for the third act to go. More fun at the youngsters' expense was out of the question and even the happy ending seemed strangely unrewarding.

The adult contingent of "Glad Tidings" is, for the most part, conscious of the kids' problems and sympathetic to them with the result that the play offers some warm and touching moments. Yet instead of enhancing the comedy relief, these moments dispel it almost entirely. This is the more to be deplored, because the cast assembled for the occasion appeared ready, willing and able to do the author justice, if only that had been forthcoming from the script.

A past master at the art of the pained expression, Melvyn Douglas gives a rounded portrayal of the magazine editor who is dismayed to be presented on his birthday with a "little stranger" weighing 118 pounds." As his old flame who turns up with this belated gift, Signe Hasso finds the going quite rugged, as most of the comedy falls her way. Pert, coy and cute, she makes much of her red bangs and throaty voice which has a way of fading away into a theatrical whisper. Haila Stoddard is competent in the thankless role of the arch publisher who loses her catch to his earlier love.

Patricia Benoit and Henry Garrard played the girl and boy with such charm and conviction that they would make a confirmed bachelor turn to thoughts of marriage. It is possible that if they had been directed into more stylized performances the comedy might have profited, but the pathos that they generated under the circumstances could never be glossed over entirely. In the role of the star's manager who availed himself of her ninety-seven unused appointments with a psychoanalyst, Rudy Bond is properly phlegmatic, while Fay Sappington has fun with the part of the maid and a Down East accent.

John Derro designed some stylish costumes for the women and William and Jean Eckert provided a workable setting which was strangely reminiscent of one that John Gielgud had used in "The Importance of Being Earnest" a few years ago. Reverting to the author, Mr. Mabley may have a talent for comedy, but here is one playgoer who would like to see him ignore the commercial producers' propensity for one-set comedies and tackle a real live drama.

"GLAD TIDINGS"

Comedy by Edward Mabley; staged by Melvyn Douglas; setting by William and Jean Eckert; presented by Harald Bromley at the Lyceum Theatre, October 11, 1951. The cast:

Ethel Nash.....Haila Stoddard
Mrs. McDonald..Fay Sappington
Henry.....James Hagerman
Steve Whitney..Melvyn Douglas
Agnes Bell.....Ann Sturgis
Maud Abbott.....Signe Hasso
Claire Abbott...Patricia Benoit
Gus Kennedy.....Rudy Bond
Terry Abbott....Henry Garrard

Synopsis: The entire action of the play takes place on the terrace of Steve Whitney's house on the Connecticut shore. Act I. A summer morning. Act II. That evening. Act III. Next morning.

DAILY NEWS

October 12, 1951

Mlles. Hasso, Stoddard Help Make 'Glad Tidings' a Nice Little Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The artistic quality of this season's stage suffered no advance last evening with the presentation of "Glad Tidings" at the Lyceum Theatre—but there were some laughs in it, which puts the play somewhere on the credit side. Edward Mabley's comedy might turn out to be "an audience show" if not a critic's show, and I hope it does. If it does, a great amount of credit should go to Signe Hasso and Haila Stoddard, two very lovely and well-dressed actresses who know how a comedy should be played. Between them they manage to make Melvyn Douglas fairly miserable, and Mr. Douglas is a good enough comedian to make an audience enjoy his misery.

Lately, though, "audience shows" haven't been getting enough audiences. The amiable and unpretentious plays run up against the grim economics of Broadway and find that living in the big town is too expensive. They'd thrive better on the Summer stock circuit—which is exactly where "Glad Tidings" thrived, or throve, or thriv, last Summer.

Now He Has Three Women.

Mr. Mabley's fable is about a man (Mr. Douglas) who is engaged to the owner of an enormously popular pocket digest magazine (Miss Stoddard). In the shore-front Connecticut palace which his fiancee has set him up in he is visited by an emotionally erratic actress (Miss Hasso) who was his mistress 20 years ago. This actress, who seems to combine the energy and lack of inhibitions of Tallulah Bankhead, Eva Tanguay, Mae Murray and Sophie Tucker, presents Mr. Douglas with a 19-year-old daughter he never knew he had.

"Glad Tidings" strikes no new note: it could have been called "Bachelor Father" or "Baby Mine" if those titles hadn't already been used. Having stated its case and presented its characters it has a struggle to keep going to the end of the third act. It gets more help from the actors than it does from the author, who finds he is stuck with an amusing idea and can't work himself away from it.

The Actors Do Nicely.

There are some other pleasant performances — particularly by Henry Garrard as a teen-age boy who has begun to wonder why his mother (Miss Hasso again) has never told him who his father was. (Douglas not guilty on this count.) Patricia Benoit plays the surprise daughter sweetly, Ann Sturgis is good as an eager-beaver girl on the magazine staff, Rudy Bond is likeable as Miss Hasso's worried manager, and Fay Sappington does one of those comedy housekeepers who infest Connecticut stage houses. The house itself, designed by William and Jean Eckert, is handsome and imposing.

The New York Times

October 12, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Edward Mabley, who was co-author of "Temper the Wind," is total author of "Glad Tidings," which opened at the Lyceum last evening. That shows progress in the right direction. For "Glad Tidings" has an impudent sense of humor and an originality of viewpoint that are worth hanging on to in the hope of getting some new playwrights into our theatre.

In the program Mr. Mabley labels his drama a "romantic comedy." If it were played that way steadily throughout the evening, it might be consistently touching and uproarious. For the situations are pretty funny, and some of the relationships between the characters are decently affecting.

* * *

It is the story of a journalist who, on his return to America after twenty years absence, finds himself the father of a charming girl 19 years old. In his youth he had been in love with a motion-picture actress whom he had neglected to marry. Being a woman of independent spirit, she had brought up the daughter without notifying the father.

There is a great deal more to "Glad Tidings." To make things complex, the journalist is on the point of marrying another woman; and the actress has one more child by another man. But the germ of "Glad Tidings" is the emotion of a middle-aged man who finds that he is the father of a very attractive, bright-minded maiden. He likes it. So does she. In fact, almost everyone likes it, including the audience.

No first-night playgoer should breeze into the theatre and start telling directors and actors their business. After all, they have been working on the production all summer. But it does seem to this theatregoer that "Glad Tidings" ought to be wholly delightful instead of unevenly amusing. If all of it were romantic comedy and none of it commercial farce, it ought to yield a wonderful evening in the theatre.

Individually, the actors are fine. Melvyn Douglas, who plays the latter-day parent, is not only a polished actor but a man of good instincts, and he makes something genuine out of the part. Signe Hasso, as the actress, is a handsome, vivacious lady with quick intelligence and a spirited style. At the moment, her voice is out of control, but that shouldn't handicap her long, and does not destroy the fact that she is a very interesting, tempestuous actress.

* * *

Haila Stoddard plays the third person in the triangle in a breezy style. As the fatherless daughter, Patricia Benoit is thoroughly enchanting; she is young without making a point of it. And Henry Garrard does a first-rate job as the brother. Rudy Bond is amusing in the part of the worried manager of a tempermental actress. These actors and their associates also have the advantage of playing inside a beautifully designed set of a manor house by William and Jean Eckert.

With so much excellent material, why isn't "Glad Tidings" uniformly enjoyable? Apart from some minor clichés, it may be because of the mixed direction. Some of it is no better than snappy farce direction—everyone moving at top speed and shouting as if he were afraid of letting the audience become acquainted with the play. Some of Mr. Douglas' staging is purely mechanical.

At least one theatregoer suspects that "Glad Tidings" may be a good deal better than the performance indicates. Mr. Mabley can write for the stage.

Journal American

October 12, 1951

Tasteless, Witless And Uninteresting

By ROBERT GARLAND

It was "Sacred and Profane" last Summer in the country. Now, at the Lyceum, it's "Glad Tidings." But not to me! What Edward Mabley has to his name is a wholely tasteless and largely witless attempt to be amusing. It isn't even interesting.

Mr. Mabley is also half responsible for "Temper the Wind" which had its day at the Playhouse in 1946. He's responsible for all of this one. But the playwriting is not improved. I found last evening in 45th Street as long drawn as it was difficult.

On "the Connecticut shore," in an un-Connecticut house where, even in Summer, they open not a window, Melvyn Douglas and Signe Hasso, as stars, and Haila Stoddard, as featured player, go through the motions. They are, at least energetic.

But not effective. I don't see how they could be. With neither taste nor wit to help them, the result is impossible. Nor is interest there to lend a helping lift. Personally, I don't care about the characters.

I wouldn't care about the characters if they came to life. But they don't! As hard as Mr. Douglas, as director, tries, they never breathe the breath of believability. It isn't that they're poorly written. They just aren't written.

* * *

Isn't Amusing

What I'm telling you about is farce, programs to the contrary. Unsuccessful farce! Two of the unstarred, even unfeatured, players are—how shall I say it?—misbegotten. Claire and Terry Abbott have no father to call their own.

Their mother, the great Maud Abbott, has managed to bring them up alone. They're good and haven't asked. She has risen to fame and fortune as an actress. And, taking things as they are, they haven't bothered. Not even in their colleges!

But, for the sake of "Glad Tidings," they begin to ask questions when the action, as the saying is, gets under way. It's embarrassing to you, to me, to everyone but them. They're used to it. They're long-suffering, insensible and don't seem to care.

And they—the children—are all that happen throughout the evening. They arrive, with their known parent, en route to Dennis, which is on Cape Cod. They linger so you may guess about their missing parent. Or parents. They depart. And their farce is over.

Even if it were interesting, it wouldn't be tasteful or amusing. And if the "Glad Tidings" of the world of make-believe aren't interesting, they aren't anything to recommend. Not even with a more forceful cast than has been collected.

* * *

Monotonous, Shrill

Melvyn Douglas has his name first among the players. And rightly. As the maybe father of his maybe daughter—the son's father is mostly in doubt—he does what a skillful performer can to keep the laughter going. I wish he were more successful.

His co-star, Signe Hasso, I haven't seen before, although I'm assured she has "appeared with acclaim" in Europe in the major works of Schiller, Ibsen, Shakespeare, Strindberg, Hofmannsthal and "Maedchen in Uniform." Broadway has seen her twice before.

In "Glad Tidings" she is Swedish and, I am sad to say, monotonous and shrill. Like so many who come to Broadway straight from Hollywood, the talking-pictures haven't taught her to act up on the stage.

Haila Stoddard, with the Jeeters of Georgia behind her, is better at the Lyceum. Patricia Benoit and Henry Garrard are the misbegotten children. New to every one, they're promising indeed. And legitimate despite their acted parts.

There are others, but they're no more help to Edward Mabley's farce than Edward Mabley's farce is of help to them. Neither is William and Jean Eckert's setting, impressive as it is. "Glad Tidings" just isn't. It's tasteless, witless and uninteresting!

New York Post

October 12, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Foreign Correspondent at Home

There is nothing much more depressing in the theater than a play that tries desperately to be urbane and sophisticated, and can't manage it. This is the dismal fate of "Glad Tidings," an allegedly romantic comedy by Edward Mabley, which opened last night at the Lyceum amid a great groaning and striving after wit and worldly wisdom. Despite the most conscientious determination to be smart, wise, polished, epigrammatic, cultured, sly and filled with references to picturesque places, it succeeds merely in being fatuous.

Its hero is one of those brilliant and debonair foreign correspondents who has been everywhere and seen everything, and its heroine is a beautiful and presumably fascinating actress who has bowled over the available men of five continents. The one surprising thing about their romance is that they are described as having met in such a comparatively prosaic place as San Francisco, since this is the only evidence supplied that the dashing fellow can do anything in a location that isn't exotic. Even when he buys a typewriter, he has to get it in Shanghai.

Settling Down

Anyway, it seems that the great reporter has been persuaded by his unworthy fiancee to give up his splendid occupation and settle down in Connecticut to the ignominious business of editing a magazine. Just as he is about to accept his shame, the alluring actress shows up after a lapse of twenty years in her romance with the famous journalist and informs him that he is the father of her ingenue daughter. It seems to be the opinion of the author that the fiancée is a disagreeable woman to be annoyed by the information.

In a manner that is not likely to disarrange the laurels of Noel Coward, S. N. Behrman or the late Philip Barry, the playwright sets out to be terribly adult, naughty and cultured about the whole situation. He also goes in for charm, for which I suspect he is not perfectly equipped. Several years ago, Mr. Mabley collaborated on an interesting drama called "Temper the Wind," which was about the Nazi resurgence in post-war Germany. It was a popular failure, but it showed infinitely more talent than "Glad Tidings" would indicate.

More Complaints

The more the new work tries to be gay and sophisticated, the duller and more naive it becomes, and the greater its determination is to be witty, the less talent for comic urbanity it reveals. Nor do I think that Melvyn Douglas has aided it by his slightly frantic direction. Actors rush on and off shouting at one another, and it certainly doesn't add to the humorous richness of the evening. The only scene I enjoyed was one in which the pampered son of the great actress turns understandably on his remarkably annoying mother.

Mr. Douglas is more skillful in his acting than in his staging, but he doesn't make the foreign correspondent an exactly fascinating representative of his illustrious profession. Signe Hasso, who has shown signs of talent in other plays, portrays the actress stridently and reveals few indications of a capacity for this kind of comedy. Haila Stoddard does as well as possible with the foolish role of the abused fiancee. By playing with sincerity and directness, Patricia Benoit is real and charming as the daughter, and Henry Garrard is quite good as the son. But "Glad Tidings" is a very feeble striving after the comic spirit.

New York World-Telegram
and
The ~~Evening~~ Sun

October 12, 1951

'Glad Tidings' at the Lyceum

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Whatever else they think of "Glad Tidings," audiences will unanimously go away praying that someone will eventually find Signe Hasso a play that really shows off her obvious talents and charms.

Like other vehicles she has found for local consumption, "Glad Tidings" is light weight. It is the sort of thing at which the more sophisticated frequenters of the theater snort. People connected with it will call it an "audience play." Perhaps it is. Before talkies, and with Gray's Drugstore still cut rating seats, it would unquestionably have managed a good run.

Nowadays its appeal must depend on some pleasant performers and the fact that it would be too censorable for pictures or radio, if not yet for television. The play skirts around one central situation, sometimes farcically, sometimes intensely, and more often just plain lightly.

A famous actress looks up an old beau who happens to be the father of her 19-year-old daughter. He is on the verge of marrying his wealthy employer, owner of the minature magazine he edits. He has never heard of his daughter before, and the actress uses the engaging offspring to win him back.

This is clearly a springboard for all sorts of misunderstandings, every one of which is investigated.

Practically every virtue the evening has springs from the performing of Miss Hasso, who is extremely decorative, as well as wise. She plays with full appreciation for the character's preposterous love of a situation.

The actress is slight and moves like a finely bred cat. She seems constantly in transit. Her poise is alluring, and her energy is carefully aimed.

It is no great compliment to the script that some of the evening's biggest laughs come from Miss Hasso's grand explosions of laughter. It is her generosity and extravagance that send breezes through the play.

Melvyn Douglas is costarred and directed the play. It is hard to tell just what attracted him to it, as his role of straight man is no particular challenge. He is agreeable enough and has kept the play on the march, even when it has no place to go.

Patricia Benoit and Henry Garrard both impress with the personal quality they bring to the roles of the actress' two children.

Haila Stoddard has the dog assignment as the self-righteous, rich and humorless other woman. Decorative as usual, she makes the magazine owner recognizable, if not dripping with charm.

Daily Mirror

October 12, 1951

Cast Makes the Most Of Frail New Comedy

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Glad Tidings," which Harald Bromley brought to the Lyceum Theatre last evening, is a frail little comedy about illegitimacy. Thanks to the slick playing of Melvyn Douglas and Signe Hasso, it seems better than it really is. Edward Mabley rings changes on a single joke for three acts, and it becomes tiresome after a while.

The new arrival has to do with a former foreign correspondent turned magazine editor, and about to marry the pretty owner and publisher. On his birthday an old flame, a flamboyant actress, turns up with her son and daughter. He is amazed to learn that he fathered the daughter.

His fiancee is so stuffy as to resent the actress, and attempt to prove that he has been taken in. But the editor packs a bag and motors away to Cape Cod with the giddy star and the children. He, no doubt, finally got around to making her an honest woman.

Douglas not only acts the role of the editor to the hilt, but has directed the romp so as to make the most of its limited values. Miss Hasso, chic and easy on the eyes, impersonates the actress with effectively bravura style. Haila Stoddard, another orb tonic, is excellent as the conventional publisher.

Rudy Bond makes a minor assignment, a harassed manager, stand out. And there are noteworthy contributions by Patricia Benoit, Henry Garrard and Ann Sturgis. Fay Sappington struggles valiantly as an annoyingly farcical housekeeper.

The setting by William and Jean Eckert looks attractive and solid below, but a little skimpy on top for a swank Connecticut mansion. The John Derro costumes are smart.

The first-nighters gave "Glad Tidings" a rousing reception. They found many laughs that escaped us and blistered their palms applauding after the final curtain. The Lyceum's new tenant has hilarious moments, but too few of them for us. It is pleasant entertainment if you're not too demanding. In our book it's a case of almost but not quite.

"Music in the Air"

DAILY NEWS

October 9, 1951

'Music in the Air' Again Endearing

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I have remembered "Music in the Air" with affection ever since I first saw it in 1932, so it was with serious misgivings that I set forth for the Ziegfeld Theatre last evening to attend a revival of this frankly schmaltzy musical by the late Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II. Old friends who turn up after a long absence most often show their age, and make one wonder why they seemed so charming years ago. Last evening my affection was revived and redoubled, for here was a captivating, heart-warming musical play being performed by a company of experts. "Music in the Air" is better now than it was then.

The tunes are Kern in his most melodious and soft-hearted mood—"I've Told Every Little Star," "In Egern on the Tegern See," "All the Things You Are," "The Song Is You." The book, by Hammerstein, is smarter and tighter than I'd remembered it—a contrasting story of two country bumpkins trying to keep their heads midst the cynicism and ruthless rivalries of big-city show business.

King's Performance Tops.

There have been some changes and eliminations in the new production. The one noticeable elimination is a role which was not dramatically important, but which did serve to bring Reinald Werrenrath on the stage to sing "There's a Hill Beyond a Hill." The song now is turned over to an excellent mixed chorus. The one noticeable change is that the bumpkins now live in Switzerland and hike to Zurich, a politically safe town, to sell their song to a big publisher. In 1932 they lived in Germany and their goal was Munich. Since then Munich has become a dirty word.

Winniger Just Right.

Everybody in this new "Music in the Air" is simply grand, but I think Dennis King tops the troupe with a superb musical comedy performance. King, who has been strictly legit—and very good—since he adored Mary Martin in "I Married an Angel," portrays a successful and elegantly dissolute playwright with enormous style and humor, and he still can sing. Opposite him in some delightful temperamental scenes is Jane Pickens, as a violent prima donna. Miss Pickens' voice is splendid—and so, too, is her acting.

There are many others in a most engaging cast who need not bow to those who played before them. Charles Winninger is in the role of a country music master which was created by Al Shean, and Winninger is just right, being both sentimental and funny. Conrad Nagel plays the music publisher with authority and charm, and Lillian Murphy, a stage debutante, sings sweetly in the girl-bumpkin role created by Katherine Carrington. Among the others who contribute to the good feeling at the Ziegfeld are Mitchell Gregg, Guy Spaull, Terry Saunders, Norah Howard and Muriel O'Malley.

Oscar Hammerstein has staged the work with his notable skill, and his brother Reginald is the producer. Lemuel Ayers has devised some charming sets, and Maurice Levine conducts an admirable orchestra.

"MUSIC IN THE AIR"

Musical play with book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein 2d; music by Jerome Kern; staged by Mr. Hammerstein; settings by Lemuel Ayers; presented by Reginald Hammerstein at the Ziegfeld Theatre, October 8, 1951. The cast:

Mrs. Pflugfelder.....Julie Kelsty
Tila.....Marybeth Fitzpatrick
Herman.....Richard Case
Karl Reder.....Mitchell Gregg
Burgomaster.....Hal Frye
Sieglinde Lessing.....
Lillian Murphy
Dr. Walther Lessing.....
Charles Winninger
Schmidt.....Carlo Corelli
Priest.....Milton Watson
Pflugfelder.....Walter Born
Ernst Weber.....Conrad Nagel
Uppmann.....Guy Spaull
Martha.....Terry Saunders
Frieda Hatzfeld...Jane Pickens
Bruno Mahler.....Dennis King
Waiter.....John M. King
Zoo Attendant.....Waldorf
Anna.....Norah Howard
Porter.....James Beni
Kirschner.....Richard Bishop
Lilli.....Muriel O'Malley
Lawyer Baum.....
Gordon Alexander
Barmaid.....Biruta Ramoska
Frau Schreimann.....
Jean Ellsperman
Frau Moeller.....Susan Steell

Daily Mirror

October 9, 1951

Ziegfeld Revival Brings Back Musical Landmark

By ROBERT COLEMAN

About every six months for the past few years we have mentioned how wonderful it would be to have a revival of "Music in the Air." And we almost talked J. J. Shubert into such a project, but he finally decided against it. Now our wish has come true, for Reginald Hammerstein fulfilled it handsomely at the Ziegfeld Theatre last evening.

"Music in the Air" boasts the finest score the late Jerome Kern ever composed, aside from his immortal "Show Boat," and there are a lot of us who think that in its way it was equally representative of the master. Every number is sheer delight. There isn't a filler in the two acts. It's all glorious music.

Incidentally, Oscar Hammerstein did the book and lyrics for "Music in the Air," as well as for "Show Boat." We must admit that his pen was sharper and more bountiful in the latter instance. The libretto for "Music in the Air" seems a little sparse and dated in spots, though it still offers many rewarding moments.

Hammerstein has staged the revival, staged it, we think, rather stiffly, without sufficient detail, with much of the grace and buoyance that marked the original. Principals are permitted to indulge in extraneous business while others are speaking or singing. And that's a cardinal sin in show business. But when the chips are down, when there is something important to get over, he comes through.

That first Broadway cast was superlative. How fondly do we remember Al Shean, Walter Slezak, Natalie and Bettina Hall. As for the current company, Reginald Hammerstein has assembled top-flighters all to carry on. Sentiment prompts us to single out and welcome back to our town Charles Winninger, who won an everlasting place in our hearts as Cap'n Andy in "Show Boat." He's excellent as the village music master.

Jane Pickens sings beautifully, and is an eye tonic as the volatile prima donna. Dennis King, usually so suave, seems to be reaching for chuckles as the philandering librettist. This is not one of this fine actor's most subtle performances, and we think director Hammerstein should share some of the blame.

Lillian Murphy makes an auspicious debut as the ambitious Alpine canary who isn't up to stardom in the big city. She is attractive and has a pleasing voice. Muriel O'Malley won an ovation as the aging prima donna who creates a nostalgic mood with her singing of "In Egern on the Tegern See."

Journal American

October 9, 1951

Lilting Music But A Limping Script

By ROBERT GARLAND

When you buy your seats for Reginald Hammerstein's reproduction of Jerome Kern's "Music in the Air," buy a package of nostalgia to lift the libretto over the weak spots. For the music is as good as ever. But the book limps more than it ought to. At the Ziegfeld, it is older than its age.

Staged by Oscar Hammerstein, responsible for the libretto in the first place, the talking seems not to get a move on. Transferring the location from Germany to Switzerland couldn't be responsible. A change of background shouldn't make the conversation lag. And it does. Not so the singing.

The singing is the call of "Music in the Air" on upper Sixth Avenue.

The singing which stems from Jerome Kern's memorable score. The singing which is accompanied by the orchestra, conducted by Maurice Levine. The singing of the principals, which is good, and of the chorus, which is better.

As long as "Music in the Air" lives up to its title, the revival—excuse it, please, the new production—is as it should be. But, I hesitate to say, the libretto does need priming. Words age faster than notes. Especially words which were not flawless in they beginning.

• • •

Over the border and among the Swiss, "Music in the Air" remains a musical-play within a musical-play. And while the music is out of Jerome Kern's topmost drawer, the play isn't out of Oscar Hammerstein's. Not by any means. And Mr. Hammerstein is here to fix it by what he has learned since 1932.

But I don't see that he has fixed it. It's awkward, it's long-drawn, it's not too interesting. To tell the truth, it seldom comes alive save when it lifts its voice in song. Then it soars. I forget the plot and listen to the music which, with echoes, will live as long as the dead composer.

Such story as registers at the Ziegfeld concerns some villagers who walk from what is now Edendorf to what is now Zurich. They have a song they borrowed from a bird. "Borrowed from a bird" is what they say and I see no reason to doubt them. They want to dispose of it. For cash, too, and in the open hand.

There's a love story, too. It spills over into the orchestra and deals with a country girl who appears unsuccessfully on the stage, a country boy who loves her and a city slicker who thinks he does. Among them, they all but break up the musical play within the musical play. But love conquers all.

• • •

It sounds silly when I tell it. And, as likely as not, it sounds silly in the more expert hands of Dennis King, Jane Pickens, Charles Winninger, Conrad Nagel and the rest. Maybe it is silly! But not when the singers sing and the talkers shut up. Not when music is in the air, the music of Jerome Kern.

Mr. King and Miss Pickens do well enough by Mr. Kern. They, I take it, respect the dead man's music as much as I. The chorus under the direction of Mr. Levine, I suppose, is admirable. I wish I could say the same of Muriel O'Malley, who makes much of the "In Egern on the Tegern See" of which I'm fond.

This new production of "Music in the Air" seems to feature this "In Egern on the Tegern See," which, if I remember, was but a charming interlude before. It's a lovely number, anyway, along with the more familar "The Song Is You." "We Belong Together," "I've Told Every Little Star" and the one about the hill.

Oscar Hammerstein, as the director, isn't outstanding. He might well get together with himself on both the book and the way it's handled. The production by Lemuel Ayers is good looking but crowded. The orchestrations by Robert Russell Bennett are effective. But you should bring nostalgia to this new production of "Music in the Air."

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

October 9, 1951

By Bert McCord

Some Nostalgic Evening

An abundance of silver threads and a few golden tunes of Jerome Kern characterized Monday's revival of "Music in the Air" at the Ziegfeld. It was an evening fraught with sentimentality, both on the stage and in the audience containing many who remembered the original production, which opened the night before Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President for the first time. That was nineteen years ago and the revival made it seem like a long, long time indeed. There were and there will be those for whom this show will provide considerable nostalgia. There will be others for whom it will serve only to accentuate the strides made by musical comedy in the last two decades.

• • •

Oscar Hammerstein 2d, who staged the production, has attempted to cut out much of the dead wood in the libretto. Three scenes were eliminated in an effort to keep the show running at a fast clip, but the action still lags and most of the material is dated. And as agreeable as they are, Kern's melodies just are not capable of lifting the book off the stage. There are one or two moving scenes, particularly the one in which an orchestra conductor ruthlessly cuts to the quick of show business to deliver himself of a few harsh words defining the difference between the pros and the amateurs.

Charles Winninger is back from Hollywood in the role of Dr. Walther Lessing, the country composer who makes the trip from his native Alps to the big city to try to have his song published. His benign stage presence is one of the assets of the evening and it is not his fault if there isn't enough comedy to offset the folksy sentimentality. As his daughter, who gets a chance to tackle the leading role in a new musical and then muffs the assignment, Lillian Murphy is simple and wholesome, which is probably as it should be. The play comes to life when she and her father, realizing that they don't belong in the theater, leave by the front of the house to return to their mountains.

• • •

Dennis King has the role of the author and composer. Gone is the lusty voice that he had in such musicals as "The Vagabond King" and "The Three Musketeers," but in its place he has a full bag of theatrical tricks and a vitality that enables him to put the role over. As the temperamental prima donna, Jane Pickens boasts a handsome voice and appearance, but might well afford to dip into the King bag for a few acting tricks. Muriel O'Malley does very well by a number in which she plays an old vedette, and Conrad Nagel has a part that fits him exactly.

One of the ironies of this revival is that Mr. Hammerstein, the co-author who staged it for his brother, Reginald, is perhaps more responsible than any one else for the fact that the show can't finish in the running today. Just as in the first act scene of "Music in the Air" he satirized the musicals of the twenties, so by his work with Richard Rodgers he has been instrumental in educating audiences to more developed musical theater. "Music in the Air," in conclusion, is an agreeable revival giving audiences a chance to dream back to the days when they hummed "I've Told Every Little Star" or "The Song Is You," but one suspects that had it been written today by John Doe or Richard Roe, it would receive short shrift.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 9, 1951

Kern Tunes Make 'Music in the Air'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Music in the Air" is one of Jerome Kern's loveliest scores. It is a pleasure now, and it probably always will be, to hear "I've Told Every Little Star," "Hill Beyond a Hill," "One More Dance," "Egern on the Tegern See" and "The Song Is You."

The songs are familiar but they wear well. The same thing is unfortunately not true of the work as a whole. It presently sports a first-rate cast of willing workers. They can only make the pieces effective but can never give the whole thing the swing or shape or sportiness it ought to have.

"Music in the Air" is a joke on theater people. It tells of some simple mountain folk, a composer, his daughter who sings and her beau who writes lyrics. They come to the city and get mixed up with some professional theatrical people, to the distress of everybody.

Full of Interruptions.

In the end it is clear that the amateurs cannot compete. They go happily back to the mountains, and pretty soon begin getting royalty checks for the music the professionals are making popular.

This is not a story, and until the end, it is hardly a situation. It is a lacy, fragile conversation piece that interrupts, and is interrupted by, the lovely Kern songs.

In its present incarnation it is desperately chilled by the big Ziegfeld Theater and a deep-freezing sound system. Furthermore, it is not thawed in the least by a production in pale cool colors, both for backgrounds and costumes, that sometimes make the actors invisible.

Casual Build.

The show was built in a deliberately casual manner, which has stage business and side talk going on through serious songs, and strains of exquisite music wandering back of dialogue. This sort of light-heartedness demands pace and bubble and intimacy it rarely gets here.

It is interesting to note the spots that elicited the biggest audience response last night. The longest legitimate hand went to Muriel O'Malley for her lovely "Egern on the Tegern See," which is the only moment in the entire show when the cast and the rest of the stage are equally dimmed to let a complete rendering of a number take precedence.

Dennis King got delighted support for the nonsense surrounding his vain reaction to "The Song Is You." And Norah Howard, who is onstage all of about 90 seconds, got the night's biggest laugh as she tried to put on Jane Pickens' stockings while the latter was singing a passionate love song.

Backbone of Story.

Charles Winninger is the backbone of the story, projecting its slender clear emotions with infinite authority. Miss Pickens has dash and vocal grandeur in a spotty role, and Conrad Nagel adds quiet conviction to the story. Lillian Murphey and Mitchell Gregg are handsome and tuneful as the bucolic lovers, and Terry Saunders adds some lovely vocal phrases.

If Oscar Hammerstein's book seems dated, he certainly can only blame himself, who, more than anyone else in the theater, has advanced the fashion in musicals since "Music in the Air."